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Articles in Today's Clips

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A day care nightmare

Sunday, July 27, 2008

Michigan put thousands of children at risk by authorizing people with serious criminal records to provide day care. An auditor general report released Tuesday says 1,900 convicts passed background checks from 2003 to 2006 that failed to flag them as unsuitable child care providers. Those numbers are frightening and inexcusable.

The state, appropriately, has beefed up its background check process. Auditors should go back and test those changes to make sure they are working. Putting even one child in the care of a convicted criminal, who might do them harm, is unacceptable.

The audit found that the Department of Human Services (DHS) placed about 4,600 children in day care with unsuitable criminal providers. The audit did not look at all licensed day care operators, just those who participate in the state's Child Development and Care Program. The program provides financial assistance to parents enrolled in education and job training classes.

DHS officials say much of the day care those clients use is provided by relatives, neighbors or friends. Even so, if the state is approving and paying people to provide day care, thorough background checks are essential.

The previous background check process was so inadequate that it allowed prison inmates and those on the state's sex offender registry to be approved as day care providers. That is unconscionable. Four prison inmates even received day care approval -- behind bars -- and subsequently collected nearly \$5,000 from the state for day care services.

More than 400 of the 1,900

convicts approved as day care providers had histories of child abuse and neglect. Another 31 were registered sex offenders. A check of the state's sex offender registry would have turned up those names, if it had been checked. Similarly, a check of the Corrections Department's online inmate and parolee list would have flagged the inmate names.

Since the audit was completed, DHS has expanded day care background checks to include the state and national sex offender registry and the Corrections Department's tracking system, in addition to the previously used Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) database.

Auditors said the codes DHS used to check ICHAT's database for certain crimes were sometimes out of date and failed to detect criminals approved or working as day care providers. DHS also was slapped for being lax in doing background checks on individuals living in private homes with people approved to provide day care services.

Using multiple resources for background checks makes sense. That should provide a more comprehensive report. It also should make it easier to do monthly checks to flag people who pass initial muster as day care providers but run afoul of the law later. Getting unsuitable providers off the day care list will keep vulnerable children out of potentially risky situations. No one wants day care to turn into a nightmare for youngsters.

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Don't let long-past crimes lock out good caregivers

BY MIRIAM AUKERMAN DETROIT FREE PRESS JULY 27, 2008

This week's headlines about criminals providing child care in Michigan are likely to scare people like me -- working parents. But those headlines assume, incorrectly, that anyone with a criminal record shouldn't take care of kids.

While my two young girls are in day care, I spend my working hours helping people with criminal pasts overcome barriers to employment, and I've learned that having a record doesn't necessarily make you a danger to kids.

Take my client Jane (not her real name), who has been doing child care for years and gets glowing reviews, but who was recently told by the Michigan Department of Human Services that she wasn't fit to take care of her own grandkids because of a misdemeanor fraud conviction in 1979.

Or there's Sandy, who has adopted five foster children and passed three home studies, only to now be told that she's not good enough to watch her grandbabies because of a record for fraud from 1983.

There's no question that DHS should do a better job screening out caregivers with histories of child abuse or sex crimes. But DHS also disqualifies potential caregivers for minor offenses such as "consuming alcohol in an unlicensed establishment."

Moreover, under DHS rules, convictions are disqualifying for life, even though research shows that after seven years of crime-free behavior, people with criminal records have essentially the same risk of offending as people without a record.

The auditor general's report about Michigan child care that received national attention this week told us that some people with convictions are caring for

kids, but it did not tell us whether those convictions were decades old or whether they were for petty offenses.

What we do know is that many excellent daycare providers, like Jane and Sandy, are losing their jobs. We also know that many parents are being told that they cannot hire the person they most want or trust to take care of their kids.

What's the solution? By all means let's make sure that dangerous offenders aren't caring for our children. But let's also ensure that good caregivers, who happen to have old or minor convictions, can still work. Let's put time limits on offenses, rather than disqualifying people for life. Let's allow people with records to prove they would be responsible babysitters by developing an effective appeal system for care providers who have been disqualified. Let's allow parents to make informed decisions about who is the best caregiver for their children.

And let's recognize that there are many people who can love and care for kids despite having a criminal record.

MIRIAM AUKERMAN, 39, directs the Reentry Law Project of Legal Aid of Western Michigan in Grand Rapids (reentry.mplp.org). The project provides legal assistance to people with criminal records.

Q&A: Ways to measure child day care quality

Posted by [lfirant](#) July 26, 2008 19:59PM

A state audit released last week revealed that Michigan's Department of Human Services authorized 1,900 unsuitable day care providers during a three-year period ending in 2006, placing 4,600 children at risk.

We talked with Pam Smith, executive director of Ann Arbor-based [Child Care Network](#), about the audit's findings. The Child Care Network offers a free referral service, a family services program that provides tuition assistance for child care expenses, workshops, and other resources for parents and child care professionals.

The organization encourages parents to be proactive and investigate providers before placing children in their care.

Q: Were you shocked by this finding?

A: It was disheartening. However, the audit did not report how many of the 1,900 were working in family or relative home care. Centers, family and group homes are licensed or regulated. Family or relative homes are the least regulated.

Q. Should Washtenaw County residents be concerned?

A: Every parent in Washtenaw County and any parent in the state of Michigan, in fact, ought to do their homework when looking for child care. They really need to talk to the people, interview them. They should drop in unannounced and trust their instincts - have actual hands-on experience with the provider. Ask to talk to other parents who use their services.



Pam Smith, executive director of Ann Arbor-based Child Care Network, says it can be time-consuming for parents to find quality care for children.

You can ask if the provider is accredited. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has an accreditation system that sets professional standards for early childhood education programs, and to help families identify high-quality programs. You can also ask to see documentation of their education and training. Research has shown that the more education a provider has directly affects the quality of care. Every provider has to have 10-12 hours of training each year, as required by the (Department of Human Services), that they have to document.

Q: Is it as difficult as it sounds to find good child care?

A: It's not hard to find quality care, but it's time-consuming. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that 63 percent of women age 16 and over with children under 6 were in the labor force in March 2006. We know how busy parents are today, and our services help streamline the process of finding quality care. Our city, county and state believe in quality care and back it up with funding. School-age kids need care also; it's not appropriate to leave them in front of a TV or game system all day in summer. They need appropriate social interaction with other kids their age in a licensed setting.

Q: Why should parents go through CCN to find child care? Isn't it better to find someone they know personally?

A: Child Care Network has been providing services to Washtenaw County for 30 years. We have a history of helping parents find quality care and educating them about what that actually means. We have extensive resources available to parents, and it's a free service. We're lucky to be in a community - we receive funding from the city, county, and state -

that provides funding for services to help parents and providers to become better educated.

When a parent calls us, we don't stop with just a list of names. If a parent calls the first five names we give them and isn't satisfied with the results, we'll give them additional names that meet their criteria. We have an extensive database of licensed, registered providers in a five-county area. We only refer parents to centers that are licensed or regulated. We do not refer callers to family or relative providers, where sometimes trouble arises.

We always encourage the parents to ask questions, and we have a brochure they can use and take with them, and it's all free. They should know how to do a file for a complaint history and we make that info available to them. We talk to them about what quality care is. Drop in on your provider. Because a parent in the end is the ultimate decision-maker.

Q: Any other recommendations?

A: We encourage parents to look for licensed or registered providers. We understand that child care is expensive. So if you're a single mom working a \$10- to \$15-an-hour job, we understand it's a strain. There's a number of different things available to them. They can call us about possible funding sources to help with child care tuition. There's a lending library available on not only child care, but a whole plethora of topics - things to do on a rainy day, developmentally appropriate activities to do with your 3-year-old. And it's all free.

Reporter Jo Collins Mathis can be reached at 734-994-6849 or jmathis@annarbornews.com.

Parents can visit the agency's Web site for additional information on provider reference checks at www.childcarenetwork.org or call the agency at 734-975-1840. Government phone numbers, Web sites and instructions to request a complaint history of licensed child care providers are all available.

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Comments

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Flint boy's death at day care center shows even with lots of homework it's hard to find the right place for your child

Posted by Beata Mostafavi | The Flint Journal July 26, 2008 14:00PM

GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- Krystin Jenks had no problem being picky when it came to choosing child care for her now 4-year-old son Cameron -- and she was no easy sell.

Armed with a long checklist, she spent six weeks touring sites, observing daily activities and scrutinizing staff training. She looked for safety hazards, a healthy learning environment and checked violation records online.

But even with all that homework, she said there's no way to predict every potential accident.

The death of Jahnavi Thompson, killed on his third birthday July 18 when a heavy folding table fell on him at a Flint day care center, has stunned parents such as Jenks, whose children spend hours every day under someone else's care.

"I can never imagine that," said Jenks, of Genesee Township. "It's every parent's worst fear, that something could happen when you're not there. That's why it's so important to trust who you're leaving your child with.

"It's a very big decision."

Flint Journal extras

What parents can do to become more informed:

- Ask other parents questions such as whether the provider is reliable, how their children got along with the provider and whether the caregiver was respectful of parents' values and culture.
- Visit the site and observe interactions between providers and children.
- Drop in unannounced even after a child is enrolled.
- Ask for staff backgrounds, education credentials and up-to-date training.
- Look for safety features such as gates on stairs, caps on electrical outlets, and a locked cabinet for medicine, poisons and cleaning products.
- Look for a variety of toys and learning materials, such as books, puzzles, blocks and climbing equipment, that your child will find interesting.
- Ask if the provider is accredited and ask to see a license.
- Check for any state reports on the provider (Go to www.michigan.gov/dhs, click on "child care" under quick links, then on "parent resources.").

Questions to ask:

- Do children look happy when they're dropped off?
- Is there an open-door policy for parents?
- What is the staff-child ratio?
- What are daily activities like (i.e.: do children watch a lot of TV or are they engaged in learning activities)?
- What meals are provided?
- What kinds of emergency plans do they have in the case of events such as a fire or natural disaster?
- Do all staff members know CPR and have other up-to-date first aid training?
- Are children taken out of the child care setting, such as on field trips?
- What are philosophies on discipline and potty-training?
- What will you do if my child is sick?
- How many other children are cared for, and what ages are they?

Sources: www.michigan.gov, 4C Child Care Unlimited and child care professionals.

• **For more information** visit www.michigan.gov/dhs, www.flint4c.org or playgroundsafety.org.

As a state inquiry into Jahnavi's death continues, the freak accident has raised questions about how well child care facilities are monitored as fewer state licensing monitors handle higher caseloads. It also highlights how parents can do their own policing of where they send their children.

Jahnavi's death, the first at a day care facility in Genesee County in at least two years, appears rare.

Since 2007, eight children have died at day cares in Michigan but most have been the result of unsafe sleeping conditions for infants and over health issues, not trauma, according to the state's Department of Human Services.

Twenty-seven pound Jahnavi had apparently been chasing a ball when he bumped into a wall, causing the table to fall at the Little Characters Childcare, at St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church and school, 3020 E. Dupont St.

The table, which was in a church all-purpose room, had something mechanically wrong with it and was not secured properly into the wall, according to Flint police.

"That sort of thing should never happen. Those kinds of tables should be out of the play area," said Donna Thompson, executive director of the National Program for Playground Safety. "Or someone should check on a regular basis to make sure the mechanics work and pieces are secure."

"Someone didn't do a double check. Otherwise it wouldn't have occurred. This is a highly unusual case."

The state did an on-site inspection Monday of the center, which is not run by the church, and is conducting interviews but hasn't finished its report, state officials said.

The Journal has not been able to reach Robert Thompson of Grand Blanc Township, who the day care is licensed to. The Journal also could not reach Jahnavi's family for comment.

Jenks said Jahnavi's death made her think harder about all that could happen in a place where sometimes rambunctious children play.

Her son once got bruised at day care after kicking a bookshelf, an incident that the center had to report. A tragedy such as Jahnavi's makes Jenks think of "what ifs?" such as what could have happened if that bookshelf had been heavier and less secure.

"It could happen anywhere really," she said. "You think about all of these things."

The number of injuries, violations and complaints for day care centers in Genesee County were not immediately available from the state.

There are some scenarios that parents just can't foresee, said Mary Ann Ketels, executive director of 4C Child Care Unlimited, a non-profit child care research and training group.

"I think this was just a terribly tragic event," she said of Jahnavi's death. "It's not something I think should make that parent second-guess themselves."

But Ketels said there are many ways parents can be informed.

She advises periodic unannounced visits, watching interactions between providers and children, and asking for parent referrals and the education credentials of day care staff.

She recommends looking for safety standards, such as caps on electrical outlets, secure spots for cleaning supplies and fences in play areas and around stairs.

"They need to do their research," she said. "In every environment that a child is in you have to look at that environment very carefully and look at it through the eyes of a child."

"That means you need to get down on their level physically, look around and think about all of the possibilities."

She noted that the number of state licensing consultants "has greatly diminished from what it used to be" while caseloads and responsibilities grow.

Licensed child care providers receive on-site inspections every two years but their staff members receive monthly background checks, said DHS spokeswoman Colleen Steinman.

Thompson's license was just renewed by DHS after a June 16 inspection, according to state records.

Trisha Smith, director of Kiddie Campus in Flint Township, said she can see how Jahnavi's death could raise alarm for some parents.

She said she's OK with being drilled by potential clients, many of whom want to visit with or without their children or pick up chairs and other objects in the room to check for safety.

"The more questions the better," she said.

Safety hazards was one of the biggest child care concerns for Tracie Brady, whose one-year-old son Skyler wears prosthetic braces.

She visited Kiddie Campus four times before choosing it. She got to know the staff, gleaned information on the learning structure and looked for sharp corners and heavy objects Skyler might reach.

"(The children) spend up to eight hours a day there," said Brady, of Flint Township. "I wanted him to be in a loving learning environment."

She said it's a red flag if providers don't welcome scrutiny and questions.

"If they're running their facility correctly, they wouldn't mind," she said.

Meanwhile, some child advocacy groups are working toward creating a state system that would rate the quality of child care providers -- based on everything from safety to learning structures. Some also hope for more training and mentoring for providers.

"Transforming child care is the number one priority," said Judy Samelson, CEO of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation and who lives in Flint. "The state has tried very hard to do what they can to protect children in child care and yet there's so much more that needs to be done."

She said funding is one of the biggest challenges in a quality rating or improvement system, especially for the large number of licensing consultants needed to ensure provider ratings are up to date.

"There isn't anything more important, more precious, more fundamental to us as a society than ensuring that our children make it to adulthood," she said.

"Child care is the most fundamental learning center of the 21st century outside of the home."

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Teen testifies on assault by physician

Doctor employed her mom in 2003

BY ZLATI MEYER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • July 23, 2008

An 18-year-old testified Tuesday that a Livonia osteopathic physician sexually assaulted her when she went to him for an exam to get clearance to play volleyball five years ago.

During the first day of Joseph Paupore's trial in Wayne County Circuit Court, the woman said that in September 2003, Paupore pulled away the bikini bottoms she'd worn under her clothes and penetrated her with his finger.

The incident allegedly occurred after the cursory sports physical ended and the doctor and her mother, who was on Paupore's medical staff, had left the exam room. Paupore then came back in, the woman said.

The Free Press does not typically identify alleged sex-crimes victims.

According to Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Lori Dawson, the teen's mother didn't have medical coverage, but Paupore offered complimentary medical treatment for her and her family.

On cross-examination before Judge James Callahan, defense attorney Rolland Sizemore III uncovered a number of inconsistencies in details of the teen's testimony and listed approximately half a dozen times the teen subsequently went to Paupore for medical treatment.

He also read from a letter she wrote three months after the alleged incident, which said in part, "Thank you for always being so kind to me. I'm glad my mom works with someone like you. ... May all your Christmas dreams come true. Love always."

The teenager said she still felt uncomfortable with Paupore, but her mother made her write the letter.

"Did your mom tell you to write 'love always'?" Sizemore asked.

"No, that's because I was a 13-year-old kid," she answered.

Paupore, 42, was convicted earlier this month of sexually assaulting a patient under the guise of a medical exam. He was sentenced to 5 years' probation with the first year to be served in the Wayne County Jail.

He was convicted of four counts of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Contact **ZLATI MEYER** at 313-223-4439 or meyer@freepress.com



July 26, 2008

Man charged in sexual assault of 13-year-old girl

Evening update

Derek Wallbank
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DELHI TWP. - A 21-year-old Delhi Township man was charged today with sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl.

The girl, who reported the assault at about 11 p.m. Friday, was taken to a local hospital.

Myron Clarence Knox was arraigned on two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and another charge of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct. He is being held at the Ingham County Jail with no bond.

Officials with the Ingham County Sheriff's Office did not immediately return calls seeking comment on the incident.

WAYNE COUNTY

5 accused of exposing selves to cops posing as girls online

Sheriff: Parents must monitor kids

BY SARAH TOMPKINS • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • July 25, 2008

Five men have been arrested on charges of exposing themselves online to undercover officers they thought were teenage girls, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office said Thursday.

The suspects, who range in age from 24 to 57, used Web cameras to show their genitalia to the officers during Internet chats, said Sheriff Warren Evans.

Arrested and arraigned were Scott E. Eckles, 36, of Westland; Waleed Wadie, 29, of Sterling Heights and Kirk A. Nagy, 24, of Romulus. They were being held in the Wayne County Jail on bonds ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

A 57-year-old Redford man was arrested Wednesday and a 29-year-old Detroit man on Thursday. Their names are being withheld pending arraignments today.

The suspects face charges ranging from illegal use of the Internet to soliciting a minor for immoral purposes. If they are convicted, prison sentences could reach up to 10 years, and Wadie, an Iraqi refugee, could face deportation.

Evans said officers patrol chat rooms daily, and the number of solicitations they get each month exceeds the number of arrests they are able to make. Parents can protect children by monitoring Internet activities, he said.

"We can't police ourselves out of this problem," he said. "We've got to be collaborative with parents."

Contact **SARAH TOMPKINS** at 313-222-6513 or stompkins@freepress.com.

CANTON

Mentor charged with sex assault

17-year-old says Sumpter Township man abused him about 6 years ago

BY BILL LAITNER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • July 25, 2008

An ex-Boy Scout leader and youth mentor in Canton faces up to life in prison after a 17-year-old Westland teen told police he was a victim of the man's sexual abuse years ago.

Frederick Pindzia, 58, of Sumpter Township was charged with six counts of sexual assault after a police search of his home turned up more than 100 photos and videotapes of boys, Canton police said Thursday.

Canton Police Sgt. Rick Pomorski asks that "anyone who recognizes the defendant and may have allowed him to be alone with their son" call 734-394-5209 anytime.

The 17-year-old, who said he was abused when he was about 11 years old, was not a Boy Scout, Pomorski said. Police would not identify the Scout troop Pindzia used to lead or the organization where he was a youth mentor.

"We don't know if the defendant was a pedophile as far as 20 years ago when he was a Boy Scout leader, but we want to put it out there in case there are other victims who will come forward," Pomorski said Thursday. Many of the seized photos of boys ages 8 to 15 date to 1999, when Pindzia lived in Canton, he said.

Pindzia was arraigned Tuesday at 35th District Court in Canton on charges including three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, punishable by up to life in prison. He was being held in the Wayne County Jail on Thursday. Executives with the Boy Scouts of America's Detroit Area Council said they had not heard of Pindzia, and they said that in the mid-1980s scouting began training to prevent abuse.

Scouts may not sleep in a tent or take a shower with any adult except their parent, said Rick Williamson, chief executive officer of the Detroit Area Council.

"But one incident is too many," and if the Boy Scouts are involved "we'd cooperate fully with any investigation," said Williamson, reached Thursday in Alger, where he was visiting a Boy Scout camp.

Pindzia has never been married, has no children and worked in telecommunications, police said.



Welfare plan an investment in Michigan's children

Saturday, July 26, 2008

By Ismael Ahmed

Special To The Press

Investing in children is the right solution for Michigan's long-term child welfare reform plan. This plan focuses on spending money to invest in children and reform the system, not wasting taxpayers' money on costly attorney fees, court costs and potential fines.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm directed me to hammer out and negotiate the successful agreement with the New York-based Children's Rights organization in the best interest of the state. This agreement puts children first. It reflects the shared goals of improved safety for children, stronger supports for those who care for them and more promising outcomes for their future.

Prior to the agreement, the Michigan Department of Human Services had already initiated new reforms that continue to invest in children. These include, but are not limited to, the following: a consortium of Michigan Schools of Social Work to research, evaluate and train social workers in the child welfare system, public-private partnerships to enhance child welfare services and a task force dedicated to developing measurable outcomes for foster care, adoption, juvenile justice, and homeless and runaway youth.

Nevertheless, this successful agreement protects Michigan's statutory obligation to protect vulnerable children by allowing the state to have a voice in the pace and direction of reforms. The state was able to select an independent monitor, who understands the complexities of child welfare practice and government practice that preserves the executive authority to run the department.

Michigan taxpayers are protected in this agreement. Attorneys estimate that continuing the case in court may cost up to four times more than what it will take to improve the child welfare system. With this agreement, we anticipate investing \$50 million annually over the next four years. If this case went to trial, we could have spent as much as \$1.5 billion in that same four-year period.

Finally, this agreement represents and honors the tireless efforts and outstanding commitment of our partners, advocates and fine state employees to ensure that every child in Michigan has a safe, loving and permanent home. Their continual investment in children is priceless.

-- Ismael Ahmed is director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

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Monday, July 28, 2008

Food bank offers grocery store appeal

Client-Choice Fish and Loaves features free items in market setting for residents in need.

Christine Ferretti / The Detroit News

TAYLOR -- Pushing his grocery cart down the aisle, Randy Sexton loads up on bacon, frozen chicken breasts and watermelon to feed his family of four.

There may be a frozen food section, freshly baked breads and produce, but this isn't your local food mart. It's a Client-Choice Fish and Loaves Community Food Pantry that allows residents to collect food items at no cost in a setting and selection like any grocery store.

"This is awesome," said Sexton, who has struggled to make ends meet since being diagnosed with a heart condition and diabetes in April.

"You have the freedom to pick what you want."

The 3,000-square-foot pantry on Northline -- a joint venture between the nonprofit church-based organization Fish and Loaves, and Gleaners Community Food Bank -- has served nearly 45,000 pounds of food to more than 300 households in Allen Park, Brownstown, Dearborn Heights, Romulus, Southgate and Taylor since opening in June.

"It gives a person dignity so they don't feel like they are just getting handouts," said the Rev. Amos Humphries, vice president of Fish and Loaves.

Taylor's volunteer-run pantry allows registered clients in the 200-square-mile service area six shopping trips per year to collect up to 150 pounds of food per household per visit.

You can reach Christine Ferretti at (734) 462-2289.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080728/METRO/807280374>



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